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ABSTRACT

This videotape transcript describes Kansas State University's Alternative Teacher Preparation Program for Rural Citizens Seeking a New Career. Three related problems affect education in the Plains States--the devastated rural economy, limited career opportunities in rural areas, and the shortage of teachers of selected subjects in small rural secondary schools. This program addresses these problems by providing a mechanism for economically displaced rural residents with bachelor's degrees in fields other than education to become qualified to teach in secondary schools. During the program's initial 2-year period--August 1987 to August 1989--21 students completed the two-semester program and were certified to teach in one or more secondary fields. Because of participants' maturity and motivation, instruction was individually designed for each student. Credits were awarded as a result of transcript analysis, demonstrated competence in specific areas, directed field experiences in local schools, field-based seminars related to local school issues, individualized learning units, "Telenet" courses, required core courses, and specific tests. Required courses were delivered as seminars at two community colleges in economically depressed areas. Student teaching experiences were coordinated with local schools. The story of one farmer's transition to teacher illustrates the success of this program. (SV)

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Professional Preparation for Rural Teachers: Growing Your Own

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The Kansas State University "Alternative Teacher Preparation Program for Rural Citizens Seeking a New Career" was made possible through funds provided by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education and the College of Education.

The project addressed three interrelated problems common to the Plains states of the United States, namely--the devastated rural economy and its effect on individual communities, limited career opportunities in rural areas, and the shortage of teachers of selected subjects in small and rural schools.

The crisis in rural areas, as a result of an economy racked by low process for farm products, drought, failed banks, foreclosures of farms and small businesses, and oil prices below production costs, is widely documented. This has affected total communities, as well as individuals. Suicides, crimes of physical violence, abuse of children and divorce have increased dramatically. Possibly not as newsworthy, but certainly as traumatic, is the loss of an opportunity for persons to pursue an occupation of choice in a geographic area and type of community in which one wishes to live and raise a family. When a farmer loses the land, there is not a comparable job in the community, and when farms fail and spendable income in a community declines, businesses of all types fail. Related career options for affected individuals are nonexistent in most rural communities. Yet some displaced persons have college degrees and are willing to pursue

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career changes, if the opportunity is available. This is demonstrated by the fact that within the past more than 1,000 person have sought information about educational/retraining opportunities through the Farmers Assistance Counseling and Training Service (FACTS) at Kansas State University.

This program was designed to develop a mechanism to make it possible for the able persons who earned bachelor degrees in fields other than education to became qualifiers to teach in secondary schools.

In many rural areas of Kansas and in specific teaching areas, there is a shortage of qualified teachers. Local school boards have difficulty in attracting teachers from suburban areas where salaries are higher and where housing, shopping and recreation are generally more desirable. Few persons in rural areas, who are not teaching, are either qualified ar available for professional positions in education. Some rural counties in Kansas are projecting K-12 school enrollment increases of more that 30% from 1980 to 1990. This problem is compounded by increased high school graduation requirements in areas where teacher shortages already exist, such as the sciences and foreign languages.

The absence of a nontraditional program to prepare economically displaced, but college-educated persons to teach in the secondary schools of rural areas is the missing link. This project was designed to develop such a program over a two-year period, with a third year for dissemination. There are several state and federal programs available to assist individuals for retraining (JTPA-Job Training

Partnership Act, REAP, etc.), but they tend to prepare them for jobs in metropolitan areas and are quite limited in scope. The loss of these individuals, with college degrees and the potential for being leaders in rural communities, would be a sad and irreversible loss to rural America.

By devising an alternate route to teacher certification for those holding an earned baccalaureate degree who cannot move to the campus, it was important that the quality of the education profession be maintained. It was the intent to provide these individuals with a program to meet the current certification standards and professional education requirements of the College of Education. The personnel in the Division of Certification of the Kansas State Department of Education were in support of such an experimental program. Certification requirements would be met in a format different from the existing on-campus/lecture routine. The proposed program was discussed with the Academic Affairs Officer of the Kansas Board of Regents.

The project was designed to cover a three-year period -- August 1987 to August 1990. During the first two academic years two groups of participants would enter the program. The third year would be used to evaluate the program.

The program was unique in many ways. The most obvious was that all students will start at the same time, but will not all do the same things to be certified to teach in one or more secondary fields in two semesters.

During the two-year period -- August 87 to August 89, twenty one students have participated in the program. Eighteen have completed

all requirements or are still completing teaching field subject matter concerns. Two students dropped out of the program to accept full-time employment and one student was asked to leave the program.

The criteria used in selecting the 21 participants were:

1. at least a bachelor's degree;
2. a minimum of a 2.5 grade point average;
3. a personal interview with a screening committee to examine such things as motivation, personal characteristics, personality, and commitment to a teaching career in a rural area,
4. evidence that the applicant's present employment status is a result of being displaced due to the Kansas economy.

In addition to these initial requirements, students were required to pass the Pre-Professional Skills Test at the state required scores in Reading, Math, and Writing. Before applying for state certification, the participants must pass the National Teachers Examination (NTE) test. Participants in the program took the same pedagogical courses required for Kansas certification as on-campus students. However, all of the participants were not required to do the exact same things to achieve this credit. Because of the maturity and motivation of students in the program, the instruction was individually designed for each participant. This was accomplished in the following ways:

1. credit through transcript analysis,
2. examinations and/or demonstrated competence in specific areas,
3. directed field experiences in local schools,
4. field-based seminars, problems/issues related to local school situations,

5. videocassettes and individualized instructional units.
6. TELENET (a two-way audio system currently available at more than 30 locations in Kansas),
7. CLEPP tests.

The program was delivered to two enrollment centers to serve adult students from two geographic areas of the state. The centers were located at:

1. Dodge City Community College--to serve the southwest
2. Neosho County Community College--to serve the southeast

The two centers selected are located 260 miles apart in distinctly different parts of the state. The southeast area, with a center at Neasho County Community College, is in the part of the state that is only affected by the agriculture and business failures associated with agriculture but has experienced the closing of a number of small manufacturing plants which employed several hundred workers. It is 60 miles to the closest four-year institution (Pittsburg State University) which offers a program for teacher certification. The southeast part of Kansas has been chronically depressed economically since the 1930s when its lead, zinc, and coal mines began to close. This was later followed by the closing of the brick factories.

The second center is located at Dodge City Community College to serve the southwest part of the state. Dodge City is 105 miles from Fort Hays State University, the closest regents' university offering a teacher education program.

In addition to the same problems created by the agriculture economy and bank closings, the southwest is faced with even worse

economic conditions caused by the drought and the depressed condition of the Kansas oil industry. Oil is the state's second largest industry. Therefore when the number one and two industries are in such condition the economic picture is not bright. The Wichita Eagle Beacon reported on April 10, 1987, that the Kansas oil industry had suffered its slowest week since 1972.

Some of the required courses meet as seminars on a regular schedule with all the participants attending. In addition to the regular meeting the students had individual assignments and projects which relate to their area of specialization. The regular seminars with the staff provided continuity as well as being the administrative vehicle for the project.

The methodology core of the program is a continuing seminar that meets regularly during each term of the program. These seminars provided the opportunity for discussion of student problems, teaching and learning experiences, and an intergration of these with the theoretical and research based knowledge about students, learning and major-field subject content. These periodic group seminars at the two enrollment centers are important for the students to develop a sense of belonging to a group and for the exchange of ideas.

The student teaching experiences was coordinated with the local school administration so as to place the project participants with master teachers in specific fields of preparation. Participants were familar with the local schools and did not have the expense of traveling to another district.

One Participant

Rodney Gilley is an example of a Kansas farmer caught in the economic crunch. He received a bachelor degree from Kansas State University in 1974 but returned to the family farm.

As a way to improve the cash flow and survive on the farm he decided to look for outside employment to supplement the farm income. In the rural Western Kansas Community of Brewster the only employment available was to drive the school bus.

In addition to the brochure prepared to advertise the program the director appeared on the local Radio and T.V. stations and articles were written for the local newspaper.

Rodney read about the program in a local paper and contacted us for more information. He discussed this program with his wife and decided that the schedule planned for the Dodge City center would be compatible with his farm schedule and with some assistance on class days with the bus driving job.

He was assigned to student teach Social Science classes at Brewster High School and assist with coaching. This was an ideal situation since he already knew all of the students in his classes. He completed student teaching at the end of first semester (Jan 1989).

At all times throughout the program one concern was that short-cuts are not being taken, but that the individuals are being well prepared to teach and will be accepted by their colleagues to become fully qualified teachers and continue to be community leaders.

The program was developed to capitalize on the maturity and motivation of persons displaced or about to be displaced from their first careers by economic conditions. At the same time, it preserves the opportunity for living in rural communities in a meaningful and productive way.

Later in the second semester the teacher who supervised Rodney's student teaching resigned. With the job open for the fall of 1989 this was a perfect opportunity for him to remain in the local community. He applied for the job and in late April was hired.

As a first year teacher he is experiencing success as a teacher and is able to live on the farm which has been in the family for three generations.

The program has not only assisted Rodney with his personal financial problem but has also assisted a very small rural school to hire an excellent teacher who will want to remain in the community.